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No. 197

HER VOTE

A Comedy in One Act

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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HER VOTE.

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*First produced on May 13th, 1909, at Terry's Theatre.
London, with the following Cast :—*

THE GIRL	Miss Eva Moore.
THE DRUDGE	Miss Suzanne Sheldon.
THE CLERK	Mr. H. V. Esmond.

THE PRESENT TIME.

3 11 2 27

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HER VOTE.

SCENE.—*Her father's office. A busy looking room. Large writing table C. at right of which sits the old CLERK at work. There is a telephone on the table. After a moment's pause the door L. is flung open and the GIRL rustles in full of intention and determination all over her. The CLERK looks up from his labours and sighs resignedly on seeing her. She sits down opposite him.*

GIRL. (*sweetly*) Good afternoon, Mr. Furdew. I hope I don't disturb you.

The CLERK moves important papers from under her parasol and gold purses, etc., that she lavishly disposes on the table.

CLERK. Not at all, Miss Elizabeth. I'm afraid the lace of your parasol has——

GIRL. (*moving her parasol*) Tch! I didn't see the inkpot was open. Is my father in?

CLERK. No, Miss Elizabeth.

GIRL. Then I want the telephone.

CLERK. Your father could get no telephone message now, Miss Elizabeth—he's on his way to Leeds.

GIRL. I am not telephoning to my father.

CLERK. (*apologising*) I beg your pardon.

(She takes the telephone, and speaks)

GIRL. I want 132 Central—please. (*a pause*) Number engaged—not at all. How annoying they are, it's only because girls are at the other end. If it were a man! Oh, yes; 123 Central? No, no. 132 Central. Which is it? Oh I don't know now—you've put me off with your talking—wait a minute—I'll get the book. (*to CLERK*) It's absurd how they hustle one.

CLERK. Quite, Miss. (*he hands her the telephone book*)

GIRL. Thank you so much. (*she runs through the pages hurriedly*) W. W. which end of the book is W? (*the telephone rings—she drops book and seizes it*) Yes, what?—Oh, good. (*she laughs and listens*) How are you?—don't be silly, Reggie. I'm in a serious mood. You were just writing to me were you, how funny, great news have you? So have I. I've got two seats for the meeting to-night—what meeting? *The meeting the suffragettes!!*

What did you say? Rates—no nothing about rates, **only indirectly**. You said *rats* did you? Well if you say things like that again you'll make me angry—yes, angry! You don't realise that it's a movement. (*she gives an enormous importance to the word*) Yes, a movement. A great movement! and it's of Vital Importance to our Sex. Yes, I said sex. what? You think we're losing sight of it—what the movement? No, the sex! Well I don't mean to lose sight of the movement anyway—it's most vital to us—(*she stamps*)—it doesn't so much matter about the sex—we've all got that—we haven't got the other. But it's coming—and what I want to say is I've got these tickets and you must take me to the meeting to-night. What? You're sending me a note? Tell me now. Can't talk it through the 'phone? How funny you men are. (*she puts 'phone down for a minute and turns sweetly to CLERK*) I hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr. Honeydew.

CLERK. (*grimly*) Not in the least, Miss Elizabeth.

(*She grips the 'phone again*)

GIRL. No, Reggie, I didn't leave the wire—your news is more serious than votes. Reggie, don't be silly—how could it be. Oh, yes—we'll get them—and *you know* we ought to have them because you told me so only last Thursday in Lady Candriff's conservatory. No, it wasn't because the waltz music made you dreamy. No! I won't be chained to a seat—and what? No! I won't write my views in anybody's blood. (*then vehemently stamping*) No, No, No—what I say is—there are a million more of us than there are of you, and we are not going to be left in the cold. No I never said a vote would warm me—but what I say and what all we women say is—something has got to be done. You can't come round for the moment! No, I don't want you—I've joined the movement.

The door is opened cautiously and the DRUDGE looks in.

The CLERK snaps at her.

CLERK. Well?

The DRUDGE rubs her nose with her apron and nods towards the GIRL, who turns sweetly to the CLERK.

GIRL. It's all right, Mr. Dewdrop. I told her to follow me up—she is in “the movement.” (*then to the DRUDGE, most graciously*) Won't you sit on that very hard sofa? (*the DRUDGE accepts the invitation*) (*the telephone rings again*) No, no, I didn't leave the wire, but a lady dropped in who entirely feels with me and I merely spoke to her for a moment.

The DRUDGE is heard to murmur huskily.

DRUDGE. I sweeps out these buildin's—I works 'ard, I want a vote.

GIRL. (*soothingly*) It's all right—it's coming . . . and oh ! then won't it be splendid !!

DRUDGE. (*sadly*) I 'ankers for it.

GIRL. It *will* make *such* a difference to us all. Oh, you've no idea ! I, oh, our *status* will be so much improved.

DRUDGE. My status 'as been a-weighing on me for weeks past.

GIRL. So it has on all our sex.

DRUDGE. I took carbodinate of soda for mine (*very depressed*)—it didn't move it.

GIRL. (*a little agitated*) No, no ! Our status isn't inside us—it's—as it were—outside—apart, as it were—politics and personal dignity—er—sex perogatives—I mean preogatives—(*she makes up her mind not to wrestle with the word and continues as if no accident had happened. Talking to the DRUDGE*) Oh, you must go to some of the meetings—it's no good their saying, "Men are men, and women are women" because we know better than that, don't we ? We want to be up and doing, don't we ?

DRUDGE. I'm allus up an' doin'.

GIRL. Yes, but I mean in a noble way—not—not practical things but—noble things—things one can't explain even to oneself—you know what I mean.

DRUDGE. (*sadly smoothing her apron—with a far away look in her eyes*) Yus, it's the vote.

GIRL. Oh, I never thought I should feel so enthusiastic about anything as I feel about this—to—to—expand one's mind—to—to—open one's arms and grasp the intangible, as it were—it gives us women new life. (*she turns vehemently to the DRUDGE*) Look at the area. (*puts back 'phone*)

The DRUDGE comes back to facts a little hurt.

DRUDGE. Eh !

GIRL. (*apologetically*) I don't mean the area you mean—I'm so sorry—I mean the—oh, the—well you know what I mean. I think its fine !

DRUDGE. The last area I scrubbed—

GIRL. *Not* that area, I told you. (*then a little reproachfully*) I'm afraid you're not being very intelligent—the Political Area—where we shall rule.

CLERK. Will you vote Tariff Reform, Miss Elizabeth ?

GIRL. Of course—it's a fine thing.

CLERK. You know all the facts ?

GIRL. (*inclined to be truthful—hesitates a little*) Er—I don't think I know quite *all*.

CLERK. I see—you are content to follow a male leader.

GIRL. There's nothing else to follow. (*the CLERK returns peacefully to his labours. The GIRL regards him for a moment with suspicion—again the telephone rings—seizing it*) That you Reggie? Yes. Oh, yes. My lady friend is still here—what? (*a pause while she listens*) What an extraordinary request—read her your note out loud—well I never. But—right—I do promise to. No, it isn't here yet—then you can't come round yourself. No—Oh, Reggie, yes I swear I'll read it out loud and then telephone you straight—right—right—but Reggie, dear old man, it's no use your talking, we want the vote, and what we want we get. Reggie, I didn't mean to call you "dear old man"—it slipped out because the telephone was between us. (*she suddenly ripples*) Oh, Reggie, shut up. (*then in a hoarse whisper*) Don't keep talking about her as "my lady friend," she isn't a friend really, she—she's only an acquaintance. I met her on the office stairs—she is interested in the movement—that's all—you can't hear? Well, I can't shout—she's sitting quite close. (*she turns sweetly to the DRUDGE who shows symptoms of dozing*) You are interested in the movement, aren't you?

DRUDGE. Yus.

GIRL. I knew you were. (*she returns to the telephone*) What? I'll ask her. Mr. Wellington wants to know if you are married—

DRUDGE. Not up to now.

GIRL. And how many children you've got—but of course—hm! passing on to next cage (*she rings off violently and crosses to the DRUDGE*) Mr. Wellington has sent me a letter which he says I am to read to you.

DRUDGE. Life's so lonely—can't 'e give me a vote? I sort of feel I could 'ug it.

GIRL. (*getting really quite disappointed in her*) I don't think you quite realise what the vote means to a woman.

CLERK. (*looking up*) What does it, Miss Euzabeth?

GIRL. It means so much that I couldn't possibly explain it.

The CLERK sighs and again resumes his labours. The office bell rings, and he rises and goes out

GIRL. (*muses*) What can he mean by sending me this note. I'll—(*she goes to telephone, irresolute*) No, I won't—yes, I will. (*and she rings*) 132 Central. (*she gets it*) Yes; yes, Reggie? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Farrow, is that you?—Oh yes, my father is quite well, thank you. I thought I was talking to Mr. Wellington. Yes, father says you were quite right about the drains—"yielding the line to a younger man"—not at all, I merely wanted to—(*shortly*) Oh, that you Reggie? No, I'm not fussing. (*the CLERK comes in*

with note) Oh, your note's just come—I—*(a long pause)* Cut off. *(she puts down the telephone in disgust and takes note from the CLERK then turns sweetly to the DRUDGE)* Don't you hate the telephone? He's at one end and I'm at the other, it's—ugh!!!

DRUDGE. I never 'ad a 'e.

GIRL. I've got to read this aloud to you—you don't mind, I promised. *(the DRUDGE wearily acquiesces, and the GIRL opens the note and begins)* "Elizabeth," that's me. No "dear" or anything, just "Elizabeth," shortly, how odd. "Tell your lady friend to get hold of a good fellow and marry him."

DRUDGE. *(brightens considerably)* 'Ear, 'ear!

GIRL. "Tell her to go home and have a fine large family and bring 'em up to be defenders of the Empire."

DRUDGE. 'E talks sense—I'm with 'im.

GIRL. "As for you, Elizabeth"—*(she turns and beams on the DRUDGE)* He's talking about me now—

DRUDGE. 'E do chat, don't 'e?

GIRL. "I have been made junior partner this morning, so we can be married in a fortnight." *(she squeals a little squeal, then controls herself and resumes reading, hurriedly)* "I can't take you to the meeting to-night, I'm too busy, but I could spend the entire evening with you if you are likely to be at home—we can be married Thursday week. Telephone reply. Reginald Wellington." *(she flies to the telephone)* 132 Central, please. Hullo! Hullo! who's that?—I want Mr. Wellington.—He's out? No, no! Who are you?—"His clerk." "He's gone to the bar for a sandwich." I thought they went there for a brief—follow him—find him out wherever he is—tell him I shall be at home—at home—my gracious me *(loudly)* I shall be at home the entire evening. Who am I? Oh, what a fool the man is—all clerks are—I beg your pardon, Mr. Faldew.

CLERK. Don't mention it, Miss Elizabeth.

(She wheels back to the telephone)

GIRL. I—I, Miss Nanson shall be at home the entire evening—tell him at once I shall be at home all the evening—got that—good! *(she replaces the telephone and sinks into chair exhausted)* Oh dear, the telephone makes me get hot all over. *(there is a pause—after which she turns sweetly to the CLERK)* I hope I haven't interrupted you, Mr. Mildew.

CLERK. Not at all

GIRL. But father doesn't mind my using it when he isn't here and it is useful, isn't it?—Thursday week, isn't it wonderful? *(she wakes out of her dream and rustles around)*

Where *did* I put my gold purse. (*and she proceeds to ransack the table*)

DRUDGE. (*to herself*) Go 'ome, 'ave a large family and defend the Empire.

CLERK. (*grimly*) Better finish the office stairs first, Baker!

DRUDGE. (*rising*) Yus, sir! (*and she wakes out of her dream*)

GIRL. (*has collected her belongings*) Here's my purse—(*she turns rippling with inward joy, and sees the DRUDGE*) Oh, I'm so sorry—I forgot you for the moment—but I hadn't forgotten you really—I'm so glad we've had this talk. Oh! and (*with great graciousness*) you can have my ticket for the meeting to-night—I'm afraid I shall be too busy to use it now—but *you'll* use it *won't you?* You won't *back out*—it's so cowardly to back out—if you women don't stick together, your cause will never advance—you must show a bold front or nothing will be accomplished.

DRUDGE. Ain't *you* goin' to the meetin'?

GIRL. Oh no! Not now—I—er—circumstances have arisen—I'd sooner you had my ticket—I'm going to have a little chat with Reggie. (*and she ripples out of the office*)

CLERK. (*grimly*) Let's get back to our work.

DRUDGE. (*looking dreamily at the meeting ticket*) Yus, sir.

CURTAIN.

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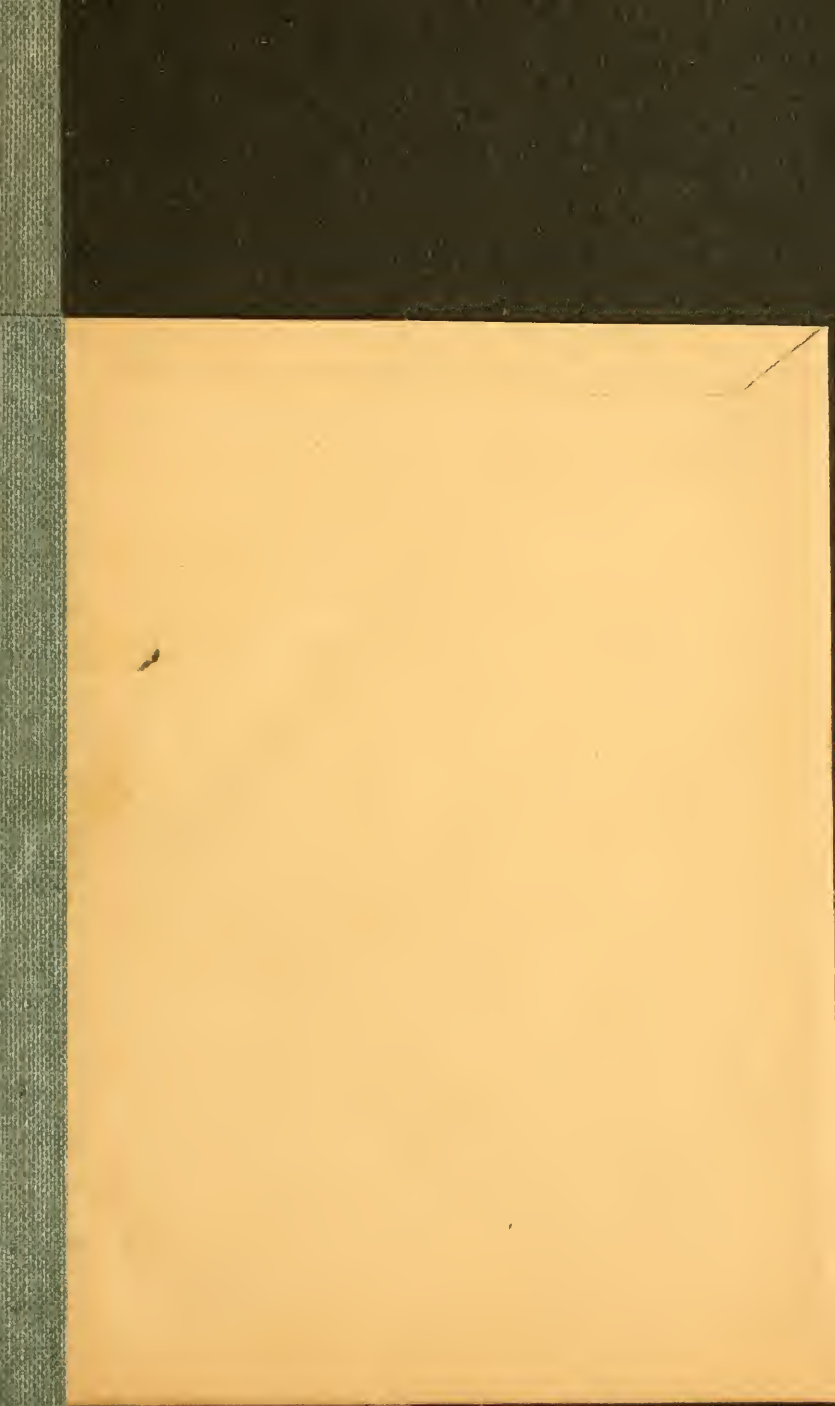
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